



The Catskill Fly Tyers Guild GAZETTE



Volume 20, number 6

November 2017

There is no November meeting of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild. Stop by the guild table and say hello at the Arts of the Angler Show, November 4 and 5, at the Ethan Allen Inn, Danbury, CT, and at the International Fly Tying Symposium, November 11 and 12, at the Lancaster Marriot Hotel in Lancaster, PA. See the ads at the end of this issue of the *Gazette*.

Tyers Needed

If you'd like to tie for the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild at The Fly Fishing Show on January 26, 27, and 28, 2018, at the New Jersey Convention and Expo center in Edison, NJ, contact John Kavanaugh at flymank@optonline.net, call his cell at (973) 219-7696 and leave a message with your contact information, or contact him via his Facebook page.

Meeting Program Demos Needed

Got a hot fly or a slick technique you'd like to share with other members of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild? Have you made an interesting presentation to your local club that you would like to repeat for the guild at a future meeting? Or do you know someone who'd give an interesting meeting program, but who isn't a guild member? Nonmembers who give programs receive a one-year complementary membership. Contact the program chair, Gary Moleon, myvettech@yahoo.com or (201) 921-8136. Help us make guild meetings the place to be on the third Saturday of each month.

New Hats

We've received a new order of the Catskill Fly Tyers Guild hats. Next year, 2018, is the guild's twenty-fifth anniversary, and these are the anniversary edition of these popular hats—"Since 1993" appears around the adjustment opening in the back. They are available at meetings and at the upcoming fishing shows.

Looking Back Upstream



The Fly Tyer From Tomahawk: Keith C. Fulsher and the Thunder Creek Streamer By Merrill "Doc" Katz

The fly-tying and angling community will miss Keith C. Fulsher, the fly tyer from Tomahawk, Wisconsin, who passed away on August 11, 2017, in Eastchester, NY, at the age of ninety-five. Keith was a fly tyer's tyer. Charlie Krom, a fantastic fly tyer in his own right and coauthor with Keith Fulsher of *Hair-Wing Atlantic Salmon Flies*, told me in December 2015, "He's the best tier of his century . . . bar none." Of course, there have been numerous other tyers who contributed to the craft, and Keith wrote in his introduction to *Tying and Fishing the Thunder Creek Series* that "Charlie Krom is the greatest fly tier I know." But in a recent e-mail to me, Charlie noted that Keith "was my fly tying inspiration and a brother I never had. Every fly he tied looked like it came out of a mold— such talent and not a bit of snobbery in his soul."

When I last spoke with Keith, he said “Merrill, I won !” I took that to mean that he had enjoyed a long life and the opportunity to pursue his fly-fishing passions. He was also a conservationist and understood the need to protect our coldwater resources. Keith was among the group of forward-looking individuals who started the Theodore Gordon Fly Fishers. I hold very fond memories of Keith, and as one of his former fly-tying students, I will cherish his memory and will remain indebted to him for helping me to refine my tying skills.

I have many samples of Keith’s flies, those he sent me at Christmas and some that he tied in his excellent advanced tying classes. Keith also gave me a manually typed nine-page pamphlet, *The Story of the THUNDER CREEK SERIES of Baitfish Imitations* (ca. 1965), which describes the evolution of these flies. This pamphlet predates Keith’s first book, *Tying and Fishing the Thunder Creek Series* (Freshet Press, 1973), by eight years. In the pamphlet, Keith wrote, “There is a beautiful little brook trout stream that flows through the woods of North Central Wisconsin called Thunder Creek. . . . Thunder Creek has an ample supply of deeply colored brook trout as well as baitfish and it was there that I first tested out my exact imitation theory of creating an artificial minnow out of bucktail.” That is where he developed “a series of patterns . . . that seemed to appeal not only to Brookies but also to Browns and Rainbows. . . . Inasmuch as these bucktails were not tied along conventional lines, it seemed fitting to name them after the stream where they were first used.” The remainder of the pamphlet discusses tying the flies and provides an index of seven primary patterns. By the time Keith published his first book, the number of patterns was now expanded to fifteen.

These early patterns were simple in design. He used bright red tying thread, with the red collar formed from the thread upon completing the fly providing the flash of the open gill covers of a baitfish. He incorporated body flash by wrapping an embossed silver tinsel body along the hook’s shank. The back of the baitfish imitation was formed by tying brown bucktail over the back of the fly, and the belly of the fly was tied from white bucktail, with the butts of the hair lashed at the head of the fly and the points extending beyond the eye. . It is interesting to note that Keith attributes the reverse tying method for the bucktail to Carrie Stevens, who tied a saltwater pattern in this manner.

Both bundles of hair must be tied so they abut the eye of the hook, and Keith stressed that it is imperative to keep these sparse. Wetting the hair before it is tied in is very helpful—it keeps the bundles nicely separated. The shape of the head is formed by covering the butts of the hair with tying thread—a barrel-shaped head is preferable. Once the brown bucktail is pulled tightly back over the thread base and tied tightly in place, the hook is turned over in the vise, and the white bucktail is pulled back and tied down with several tight turns of thread. The thread is the whip finished, forming a thin red collar.

Keith put three coats of water white lacquer on each fly head. He placed a yellow dot of lacquer at the center of each side of the head and, when that was dry, added a black dot for the pupil. Keith used a cocktail toothpick to apply the eyes. Instruction for tying these patterns can be found in *Tying and Fishing the Thunder Creek Series*.

Good fly tyers evolve, as do their flies. When new tying materials are developed, tyers at all levels adapt these materials to suit their needs. In 2006, Keith Fulsher, in conjunction with David Klausmeyer, published a new book entitled *Thunder Creek Flies: Tying and Fishing the Classic Baitfish Imitations* (Stackpole Books). This volume contains twenty-three freshwater patterns and six saltwater patterns. The basic tying and construction of the flies remains as described above. Variations on the original patterns incorporate a Krystal Flash underwing in place of a wrapped tinsel body. Keith switched to white 3/0 thread for tying in the bucktail and shaping the head. Once satisfied with the shape of the head, he tied off the 3/0 thread and finished the remainder of the tying with white 6/0 thread. He now preferred finishing the heads with a thin coat of Devcon two-ton epoxy. This mixture requires a twenty-four-hour drying time, but allows the treatment of more flies than would be possible with five-minute epoxy. He changed from lacquer to Testor’s enamel for painting the eyes and changed from yellow to white for the iris color on most patterns. Once the enamel is dry, it is a good idea to cover each eye with a small drop of epoxy. This protects it from chipping away while it is being fished. The collar is painted with a touch of red enamel at each side to simulate the flash of open gill

covers. These baitfish imitations are simple in design, durable, imitative, and precisely tied. They exemplify Keith Fulsher's tying skill and his innovative ability.

The key to tying better flies is in the selection of appropriate materials for the flies you are tying and applying those materials to the hook in a concise manner. It is also necessary to tie efficiently, avoiding the use of too much material or too many turns of tying thread. Keith's flies epitomized these postulates.



Original Silver Shiner
Tied by Keith C. Fulsher

Hook: Mustad 9575 ring eye
Thread: Red 6/0
Body: Embossed silver tinsel (Verni)
Top Wing: Natural brown bucktail
Belly: White bucktail
Eyes: Lacquer, yellow iris, black pupil



New Silver Shiner
Tied By Merrill Katz

Hook: Mustad 9575 ring eye
Thread: 3/0 white and 6/0 white
Body: None
Underwing: Silver Krystal Flash
Top Wing: Natural brown Bucktail
Belly: White bucktail
Eyes: Enamel, white iris, black pupil

A special thanks to Charlie Krom for providing some personal material for this small article about a great angler.



Anything You Desire

Since the regular season has closed, and the little streams I frequent are safe from hook points and long leaders, my recent visits to the Catskills are more work related, with some socializing in between.

Winterizing the summer house, fall yard cleanup, and stacking firewood replace stalking wild trout in small streams. I also spend quite a bit more time in the fall hanging around the Roscoe fly shops, sharing stories and catching up on the year's happenings.

Since I don't live in the beautiful mountains of the Catskills, and I typically fish early mornings and by myself, I don't meet many anglers on stream. In fact, this year, I did not even meet one solitary fly fisher. I did a few local trips with friends, but these are guys I know well, both abilitywise and personally. So when we chat about all things angling, it's just chitchat, familiar topics and a lot of agreeable dialogue.

Hanging out in fly shops is always a good time. You're in the company of anglers of various experience, from seasoned guides to the guy looking to buy his first rod. The most interesting ones of all, though, are the in-between, the 90 percent group, and these come in very colorful sizes.

I was making my shop rounds in Roscoe and had been in this particular store for only a few minutes when a wader-clad man around my age walked in, made a beeline to the fly bins, and peered into the vast expanse of partitioned bug holders in preparation of his midday trip. After a few minutes of looking, he made his way to the counter, and I stepped away to give him room to continue on his quest. As he got there, he firmly stated, “I should be fishing Tricos now—right”? (As a side note, his pronunciation of Trico was “tree-co.”) Then he said, “What are they, like a size 14?” The proprietor smiled and said that the Tricos are pretty much over and also much smaller—a size 24 would be close.

On the counter next to the customer was a small container, the kind used by fast-food restaurants to hold ketchup and by fly shops for customers to carry flies, and in it were a half dozen Morrish October Caddises, size 6. A Morrish October Caddis is a very ornate, semicomplexed fly to tie and in my opinion does a decent job of imitating the large caddises that we see in the Catskills streams around September and October. I like ’em in a size 10.

The store owner picked up the small paper cup and, spilling them on the glass countertop, stated that these would be a good choice for early October. The customer looked at them and said, “They are like March Browns—right?” The owner smiled and said, well, they are caddis imitations; the March Brown is a mayfly and is available to the trout much earlier in the season. But these bugs are hatching right now. The guy kind of grumbled a bit, but held firm that it would be a fly he would use for March Browns.

It was after he left the store that I started wondering how someone can know what a tree-co is and a March Brown, but have no conception of size or shape. Obviously, he had read or heard of these bugs, but that’s where the research ended. It got me thinking of how much a simple book like Art Flick’s *Streamside Guide* can teach you without your having to take entomology classes.

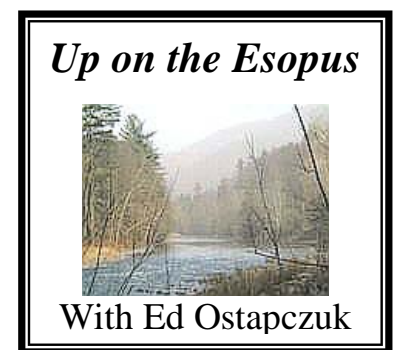
It also made me smile, thinking that even with no knowledge whatsoever of bugs and hatch timing, we can still string up a rod and maybe fool a couple using the “wrong” fly.

The sport of fly fishing is so much fun because you can make it anything you desire. The places we choose to fish can be as easy to access as the local diner or as difficult as scaling Everest. You can use a hand-me-down rod and reel or just keep buying the newest and greatest offerings. And best of all, you can fish a size 14 in a Trico hatch and a Morrish October Caddis during a March Brown hatch and still have a pretty good shot at catching a trout.

Harry Murray and a Southern Classic

My wife and I recently returned from a week of hiking and fishing in Shenandoah National Park, a trip I’ve been making since the 1990s. Outside the Catskills, the Blue Ridge Mountains and the wild brook trout streams that drain them have always captured my fancy. These watersheds are special in their own right, attracting anglers from near and far—anglers like me.

One such trout stream is the Rapidan, where in the 1920s President Herbert Hoover and his wife, Lou Henry Hoover, built a rustic retreat from the day-to-day grind of Washington, D.C. as our nation entered the Great Depression. Hoover Camp, or Rapidan Camp, as it’s also known, is a National Historic Landmark located in Shenandoah National Park. Several of the original buildings still stand next to a river named after England’s Queen Anne in combination with the word “rapids”: the river was originally known as the Rapid Ann River. In recent years, a series of trout flies have been associated with its name. Most famous, and a true Southern classic dry fly, is the Mr. Rapidan created by Harry W. Murray.





Murray was born and raised near the banks of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River in the village of Edinburg, Virginia, where he stills lives and operates Murray's Fly Shop, established in 1962. He is the author of several books, perhaps most notably *Fly Fishing for Smallmouth Bass* and *Trout Fishing in the Shenandoah National Park*. Over the years, the latter has served me well as a fine reference. There, Murray discusses his Mr. Rapidan, noting: "The first significant hatch to occur is the Quill Gordon. The artificial Quill Gordon dry fly has long been the standard for this hatch," but it's "difficult to keep this delicate pattern floating on rough water." The Mr.

Rapidan was developed "to match this first insect . . . providing excellent angler visibility and floating qualities."

The Murray's Fly Shop Web site provides additional information on the creation of this pattern. It was originally developed in the early 1970s when two fly fishers asked Murray to tie them a dry fly that they could use early in the season, that would float well, and that could be seen on choppy waters. Murray says that at that time, he was writing his Shenandoah National Park trout-fishing book and working with Art Flick to identify Blue Ridge Mountain insect hatches. His intention was to develop a pattern that might be used for Quill Gordons and March Browns, that is, for multiple mayfly hatches. He credits Sigrid Barnes, wife of Pat Barnes, who owned a Western fly shop, for the suggested use of yellow calf tail wings to improve visibility.

Over time, the Mr. Rapidan evolved into a series of related flies, while the original pattern changed a bit with the availability of new materials. Initially, Murray blended his own body dubbing, which I still do.

Hook: Mustad 94840, sizes 12, 14, and 16

Thread: Tan

Tail: Straight moose hair

Wing: Fluorescent yellow calf tail

Body: Quill Gordon Fly Rite #34 or natural gray muskrat mixed with Sulfur-dyed rabbit in a proportion of 3/2

Hackle: Brown and grizzly



Decades ago, as my eyes got old and tired, I began fishing Mr. Rapidan in place of the Adams, because of its yellow calf-tail wings. I found that the dry fly floats like a cork and is easy to spot in the foamy, white Esopus Creek pocket water. Typically, it's the first dry fly I use every spring, and I also use it for multiple freestone spring hatches of the dark mayflies. In doing so, my only variation is the size of the Mr. Rapidan I fish.

Book Review

Fly-Fishing Soft-Hackles: Nymphs, Emergers, and Dry Flies

By Allen McGee. Published by Stackpole Books, 20117; \$29.95 softbound.

Articulated, extended-body soft hackle. That's one of the innovative fly designs that leaps off the page of Allen McGee's *Fly-Fishing Soft-Hackles*, and it represents the essence of this exciting and comprehensive book about a very old and traditional fly design—a design that, in its elemental form, the North Country Spider, is merely a hook, a thread body, and a sparse single turn of a pliable feather. Here, you're in the hands of someone who has thought long and creatively about how to apply and

carry forward this venerable tradition and in the process transform it into a forward-looking style of tying and fishing the artificial fly.

“Progressive” is the word that McGee uses to characterize his approach to fly design and presentation. Compared with his earlier book, *Tying and Fishing Soft-Hackled Nymphs* (Frank Amato, 2007), which largely covered the basics, *Fly-Fishing Soft-Hackles* “expands on the field, and I hope it pushes the boundaries of how we think about soft-hackle flies and what they can imitate,” McGee writes.

What they can imitate, as McGee ties and fishes them, includes not just the nymphal, pupal, and emerging forms of mayflies and caddisflies, as the traditional ties mostly do, but the adult forms of these insects, usually fished with dry flies, as well as the spinner stage of mayflies, plus the nymphal and adult stages of stoneflies, terrestrials, and midges, and even scuds and baitfish. And they also can be tied as general attractor patterns. He has thus expanded the received conception of the soft-hackle fly—wingless wets, winged wets, and, more recently, the flymphs developed by James Leisenring and Vernon “Pete” Hidy—to include imitations of virtually everything a trout eats.

He sums up his design philosophy for all these flies as “B.A.M.”: the fly and how it’s fished should imitate the behavior of the originals in their natural environment, their characteristic action in the water, and their movement through the water and within the water column. Too much realism is “a detriment,” he believes, because it makes a fly “stiff and inflexible,” and what a fly needs to imitate is, basically, life.

That, of course, traditionally has been the soft-hackle fly’s claim to fame—its behavior, action, and movement anywhere in the water column are lifelike. On the one hand, that tradition is as old as the documented history of fly fishing itself: among the flies listed by Dame Juliana Berner in *A Treatyse of Fysshynge with an Angle* in the fifteenth century is the “donne fly”—today, we call it the Partridge and Orange. On the other hand, the soft hackle also has been seen as something brand new, at least in the United States. Many modern American anglers associate it with the work of Sylvester Nemes, who in his first book, *The Soft-Hackled Fly*, in 1975, could declare that he wrote it “because the soft-hackled fly and the mending method of fishing it . . . are rarely, if ever, discussed in angling literature published in America” and that he “has never seen the soft-hackled fly used by any other fisherman.”

Nemes was of course aware of the work of Americans Leisenring and Hidy in *The Art of Tying the Wet Fly and Fishing the Flymph* in the early to mid-twentieth century and of the long British tradition of tying and fishing soft hackles. He cited numerous British works in *The Soft-Hackled Fly* and even provided color plates from E. T. Pritt’s *North Country Flies* of 1885 in his next book, *The Soft-Hackled Fly Addict*, in 1981. But Americans are notoriously more interested in pragmatic results than in history, and it was as a “new” effective way of tying and fishing flies—new to those of us who were among the audience for the original Nemes books, at least—that the soft-hackle fly appealed.

It’s that appeal that McGee’s *Fly-Fishing Soft-Hackles* extends and amplifies. The heart of the book for the fly tyer—at least for the fly tyer willing to follow McGee beyond the traditional ties—lies in the chapters titled “Progressive Fly Materials and Methods” and “Progressive Fly Design Applications.” What’s striking in both is the inventiveness of thought and the research that McGee has undertaken, beginning, in the materials and methods chapter, with a list of no fewer than ten different weighting methods and a chart of sink rates for sixteen variously weighted fly patterns.

If you tie soft hackles, you know that there are traditionally two ways to hackle them: with a single feather behind the eye, whether tied in by the tip or by the base of the feather, or palmered though the thorax, as on a flymph. McGee illustrates several more, including some employing compound hackles—two feathers, using materials such as marabou or cul de canard, in addition to the usual partridge, grouse, or hen—and some with a forward-facing hackle at the eye and a backward-facing hackle at the bend of the hook, which are pretty far out. Just the examples pictured in this section are enough to hook you on the book, unless you’re an incorrigible traditionalist.

He also not only advocates using Prismacolor or BIC Mark-It markers to achieve colored hackle and variegated colors that are not available by dying, but supplies a detailed chart showing

which specific markers will produce colors appropriate for a host of important mayfly hatches, and he gives recipes for using markers on available feathers to create substitutes for the exotic feathers such as waterhen, woodcock, jackdaw, coot, and golden plover that are specified in the construction of some traditional soft hackles. Also, because there are a limited number of appropriately small hackles on partridge, grouse, and hen capes—the bane of the soft-hackle tyer’s existence—McGee rehearses a couple of methods for using longer feathers to tie smaller flies.

What really got my attention, though, was the discussion in the “Progressive Fly Design Applications” chapter of what McGee calls UVR—ultraviolet reflection. When I started tying soft hackles, I used gray-mottled partridge feathers for the collars. The flies worked great, but I eventually strayed into the thicket of dry-fly snobbery and stopped fishing soft hackles. Recently reformed and resolved to return to tying and fishing them, I was told (I suspect by the same expert McGee cites) that I had been wrong and that only brown partridge belongs on a soft-hackle fly. McGee says I was right. “A gray partridge feather has tons of ultraviolet reflection,” and because a trout’s vision extends into the UV spectrum, this “makes a fly pop. . . . It resembles a mayfly wing, which also has UVR.” So UVR, which occurs in many natural materials, is a central concern in how McGee thinks about tying and fishing his fly designs, and he provides an extensive discussion of the implications of this phenomenon.

In addition to this, there’s a section devoted to how and why to tie those extended-body articulated-nymph soft hackles—he calls them Articulynymphs—as well as extended-body soft-hackle emergers, and (here’s where he really pushes the envelope) soft-hackle dries and spinners, the claim for these being that can be fished both on and below the surface on the same drift.

Following these chapters, there is a series of chapters devoted to matching specific hatches by genera and species of mayflies, caddisflies, stoneflies (including big Salmon Fly Articulynymphs and soft-hackle dries), as well as midges, scuds, terrestrials, and baitfish (some of the soft-hackle baitfish imitations look a whole lot like Woolly Buggers), plus a series of “modern prospecting soft-hackle flies,” all with plenty of pictures and recipes for inventive examples.

But an innovative fly still needs to be fished properly, and this is not just a fly-tying book. The final substantive chapters systematically cover presentation tactics, rigging, and leaders for the multiple-fly rigs that traditional wet-fly anglers often use. The common thread in the discussions of presentation is what McGee calls a “slack-tight” line, treading the “fine line between slack and tight” so that “the angler fully controls the line out to the leader, tippet, and fly, but fly and line also drift in a somewhat drag-free state,” a presentation achieved by “mending, high-sticking, and dropping the rod tip as the fly drifts up, across, and down and across-stream.” Treading fine lines has never been my forte, and I suspect that if skunks have followed the wandering path I do tread, it’s not just because I’m fishing soft hackles tied with brown partridge.

In addition to exhaustively discussing a number of different presentations based on this foundation, McGee also broaches the interesting idea that he calls “free-line nymphing,” a downstream presentation. This is basically center-pin fishing with a fly line. McGee writes: “I discovered that by bending the pawl spring to allow the pawl to completely disengage from the gear when the drag is all the way off, the spool turned freely, allowing the line to feed off the reel at the same rate as the current.” Of course, you can’t do that with a state-of-the-art sealed-drag large-arbor, space-age-grade wondereel, so maybe the old ways are the best ways, as a basis for innovation. Allen McGee certainly has found interesting ways to make what’s very old new again.

► **Contact Information needed:** for guild members Medric Cousineau and Allen Podell. If you can update their e-mail addresses, contact Bud Bynack at budbynack@verizon.net.



This newsletter depends on all guild members for its content. Items from nonmembers are welcome at the editor’s discretion. Without the articles, information, for-sale or want ads, cartoons, newsworthy information, and whatever else is interesting and fun that members submit, this newsletter simply becomes a meeting announcement. Send submissions to Bud Bynack, budbynack@verizon.net or 69 Bronxville Road, Apt. 4G, Bronxville, NY 10708, (914) 961-3521.



THE CATSKILL FLY FISHING CENTER & MUSEUM

Preserving America's Fly Fishing Heritage

The Arts of the Angler Show

November 4 and November 5

Ethan Allen Inn

Danbury, CT

Daily Admission \$12: Weekend Pass \$20

Kids 12 and under FREE

Hours: Saturday 8:30 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.

Sunday 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M.

The Arts of the Angler is a full-feature fly fishing show in an elegant atmosphere. Here one will find the finest contemporary and collectible fly-fishing tackle and accessories, fly-tying materials and display flies, books, gifts, and destination, instruction, guiding, and other services for the fly-fishing community. Saturday features a silent auction with items sure to be of interest to the discerning collector and aficionado. Saturday's dinner program features keynote speaker Alicea Charamut, the River Steward for the Connecticut River Conservancy since 2015. She will speak about "Giving Back to Your Waters: from Novice to Expert—What you can do to help keep our waters clean, clear and free-flowing."



The 27th Anniversary International Fly Tying Symposium



November 11 and 12, 2017

At the Lancaster Marriott Hotel

Lancaster, PA

SATURDAY: 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.

SUNDAY: 9:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.

ADULTS: \$15.00 SATURDAY

\$12.00 SUNDAY

Weekend Pass: \$22.00

For more information, go to: <http://www.internationalflytyingsymposium.com>.